

Homeland Security Grants Improve Communication
By Governor Dave Heineman

Dear Fellow Nebraskans:

I was recently joined by Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy, Nebraska's homeland security director, to announce the distribution of more than \$23 million in federal funds to 75 counties as part of the 2005 Homeland Security grant allocations.

The statewide focus in recent years has been to upgrade communications networks for first responders and to improve local, regional and state interoperability. This funding makes a real difference in ensuring emergency personnel and local law enforcement have the ability to communicate with one another on a day to day basis.

I want Nebraskans to know that these grants have a direct impact on public safety. The ability to communicate more effectively in an emergency translates into time, and those extra moments can make a life or death difference.

Few states understand better than Nebraska the diverse challenges of protecting rural, urban and suburban areas. New this year is \$5.1 million in funding for Douglas, Washington and Sarpy Counties as part of an initiative that addresses the specific needs of the greater Omaha metro area and surrounding communities.

Urban areas face very different challenges in responding to an act of terrorism, natural disasters and other emergencies. This funding will coordinate preparedness efforts with emergency management officials, law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel, health care providers, utility companies, and volunteer coordinators.

In many instances, counties have joined together to address regional communications needs. This coordination has been a major factor in our state being able to quickly evaluate grant proposals and direct funding to local communities. The following are some of the major projects receiving homeland security grant funding for 2005.

The southeast Nebraska Counties of Cass, Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, and Richardson will receive \$741,000 to make upgrades to the regional communications network and link to the Douglas County and area utility communications systems. Lancaster County will receive \$1 million to provide interoperable communications equipment to Lincoln and Lancaster County first responders, including wireless data equipment that supports GIS mobile mapping.

The northeast area of Cedar, Dakota, Dixon, Knox, Thurston, and Wayne Counties will receive \$1.9 million to begin building a communications system to unite this six-county region and allow for interoperability with other Nebraska and South Dakota first responders.

In the north central area, Boyd, Brown, Holt, and Rock Counties will receive \$451,000 to update and expand communications systems and improve interoperability in the Sandhills region. Cherry and Keya Paha Counties will receive \$226,000 to enhance communications and expand interoperability with regional neighbors and South Dakota.

In the central Nebraska region of Adams, Buffalo, Dawson, Franklin, Frontier, Gosper, Hall, Hamilton, Harlan, Kearney, Lincoln, Nuckolls, Phelps, and Webster Counties will receive \$1.7 million to continue efforts to develop a regional network for first responders and coordinate with more counties in south-central and southwestern Nebraska.

In the southwest Nebraska area, the counties of Chase, Dundy, Furnas, Hitchcock, Perkins, and Red Willow will receive \$1.2 million to expand coverage and coordinate with the central Nebraska region to enhance regional communications across a wider area.

The western Panhandle area of Cheyenne, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, and Morrill Counties will receive \$295,000 to continue expanding communications capabilities and improve interoperability across western Nebraska and Wyoming. Scotts Bluff County will receive \$351,000 to upgrade from analog to digital technology and coordinate with Banner and Sioux Counties.

Our first priority in terms of Nebraska's homeland security needs has been to ensure that everyone from emergency personnel and law enforcement, to state and local officials can communicate effectively. We have made significant progress in improving local and regional interoperability in recent years.

I want to commend our homeland security planning team, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and local emergency management personnel across the state for their commitment to this goal, in keeping with Nebraska's coordinated, integrated and comprehensive approach to homeland security planning.